

From BRIAN BIRCH.

INTRODUCTION

On page 7 of the April 1991 issue of The Perfin Society Bulletin Mike Rucklidge posed the question "What is a Perfin?". He then answered his own question thus:

"A perfin is a number of holes in a distinct pattern applied to postage and other stamps."

Since this definition would equally well apply to Perforated Cancellations or even the perforations used to separate stamps, M.R. added four conditions which also had to be satisfied:

- a) Be intended for security (i.e. prevent stamp theft)
- b) Be complete on a single stamp of "normal" size
- c) Be applied before postal (or fiscal) use
- d) Be relevant to the user i.e. consist of firm's initials, monogram, trade mark, full name, design, coat-of-arms etc.

The problem here is threefold:

- 1) Any definition which doesn't define its subject term unambiguously is highly unsatisfactory.
- 2) Two of the four conditions, b) & d), are simply incorrect. There is no reason why a perfin has to be complete on a single stamp of "normal" (whatever that is) size, nor must it be relevant to the user - recognisable of course, but relevant, why?
- 3) The prevention of stamp theft, given as condition a), is an essential characteristic of a perfin and should be included in its definition. That being the case, condition c) must necessarily apply and need not therefore be stated (perforated cancellations are applied to prevent the theft and re-use of stamps after they have done duty).

A perfectly serviceable definition could therefore be produced by combining M.R's definition with his condition a), i.e.:

A perfin is a number of holes in a distinct pattern applied to' postage and other stamps as security against theft.

The situation with regard to Personal, Society and similar perforations is too complicated to dismiss them out of hand as not being perfins. Generally, such items appear to be mere publicity or gimmick and therefore, strictly, do not qualify as perfins. However, I could easily envisage an Exhibition organiser having a security problem with stamps he wished to sell for commemorative covers, etc. deciding to combine security with publicity by having a special "perfin". In spite of any such tenuous claims to propriety, all these items are best simply termed Philatelic Perfins since they have all the outward characteristics of perfins but are philatelically inspired.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTRIBUTION

In the June Bulletin (252 Pg.5-7), Bryan Toop and David Anderson put the Antipodean point of view. Rather surprisingly, Toop accepts Rucklidge's views unquestioningly. His main point is regarding the status of the circular punches applied to the stamps of Western Australia by the Convict Department from the 1860's to the 1880's, and the triangular punch used by the Tasmanian prison service. The term Official Punctures is offered to describe this category of item.

Anderson on the other hand takes issue with Rucklidge on numerous points and supplies his own definition of a perfin:

"Postage and other stamps, postal stationery and Cinderella stamps punched with initials, designs or symbols prior to use".

Here, Anderson falls into the trap of defining what he collects, rather than what a perfin is. One of the great attractions of stamp collecting is that the collector can choose to collect whatever he wishes. Collecting all types of perforation, punching etc. on stamps does not however make them perfins.

The defining of the Tasmanian and Western Australian items is somewhat more of a problem for me since I have been unable to find authoritative reference to their use. It is possible that the punches were introduced to prevent the theft of stamps but it is equally possible, and to my mind more likely, that they were used to identify convict mail.

(In recent years, convict mail in the U.K. was identified by being initialled in the top right hand corner. The initials were then covered by stamps before the letters were put in the public mails). If they were indeed used to prevent theft, then my own preferred term is Punched Endorsements.

ANOTHER CONTRIBUTION

Mike Bavin (252 Pg.7) indicates that fiscals bearing the Crown/RCJ perforation can be found on piece without tying the stamp to the piece, i.e. the stamp was perforated prior to being applied to the document. This may have been as a security device, but it is equally possible that some junior clerk unofficially pre-cancelled a number of stamps in preparation for the rush of documents after a Court session. Here again, the regulations governing the use of the perforation are required to clarify its status.

WHAT DO WE CALL NON-PERFINS?

Following Michael Rucklidge's article excluding certain items from being termed perfins, the Editor posed the question of names for the excluded items. This seems strange since only four years earlier (Bulletins 229-233) I had published an exhaustive "Glossary of Security Endorsements", compiled over many years whilst I was S.E.P.S. Librarian. The following terms for non-perfins appear in the Glossary:

Film processing perforations	Pseudoperfin
Kodak film processing perfin	Punch
Perforated cancellation	Punched cancellation
Perforated precancel	Punched endorsement
Perforation	Specimen perforation

A final contribution by Alan Briggs (253 Pg.7), although tongue in cheek, brings out a valuable point. Anyone can devise names for their own favourite specialised aspects of our hobby but very few of these are remembered even after only a few months. It is far better to adapt widely-known and accepted terms than invent new ones. A quick look through my Glossary will reveal many obscure and obsolescent terms which were included simply to provide reference to them in the future.

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